MEMORIAL DAY

With grateful hearts, we remember those who have fallen in defense of our nation

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AF

CORONAVIRUS IN NC

Rise of daily cases less with fewer tests

BY STEVE WISEMAN
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RALEIGH

North Carolina's rise in recorded COVID-19 cases continued Sunday, albeit with fewer new tests and cases than on a record-breaking Saturday.

The daily update from the state's Department of Health and Human Services on Sunday reported 497 new lab-confirmed cases, bringing the total to 23,222 since the coronavirus arrived in the state in early March.

State health officials attribute 744 deaths to COVID-19, up seven from Saturday.

The data comes two days after Gov. Roy Cooper's new executive order, called Safer at Home, moved the state into Phase Two of his three-phase reopening plan. Around the state, people are gathering in ways they haven't since March when Cooper implemented strict social restrictions by closing businesses, schools and other public areas.

On Saturday night, a crowd of more than 4,000 people gathered at the Ace Speedway, in rural northwest Alamance County, for a night of grassroots racing. It was believed to be the state's first mass gathering for a sporting event since the pandemic shut down such gatherings two and a half months ago.

The speedway's owners, the father-and-son tandem of Robert and Jason Turner, fought Cooper's order limiting outdoor mass gatherings to 25 people. That mandate was part of Cooper's executive order calling for Phase Two of a plan to gradually

SEE CORONAVIRUS, 2A

COVID-19 infections as of 5 p.m. Sunday.

N.C.
23,364 confirmed cases
784 deaths

WAKE CO.
1,448 confirmed cases
32 deaths

DURHAM CO.
1,262 confirmed cases
44 deaths

ORANGE CO.
302 confirmed cases
39 deaths

SOURCE: THE N&O GATHERS THIS DATA FROM NCDHHS AND COUNTY HEALTH DEPARTMENTS.

Speedway opened to fans – they came by the thousands

ROBERT WILLETT rwillett@newsobserver.com

Hundreds of race fans wait in line to purchase tickets at the Ace Speedway on Saturday in the rural Alamance County community of Altamahaw near Elon. Despite Gov. Roy Cooper's mandate limiting mass gatherings, a capacity crowd of more than 4,000 showed up.

BY ANDREW CARTER
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ALTAMAHAW

They lined up more than two hours before the first race Saturday at Ace Speedway, and soon that line stretched 700 feet from the little ticket hut near the front gate all the way to the road. Some of them drank beer while they waited, or smoked cigarettes. They stood close together, without fear of the virus or concern for social distancing.

At the country speedway in the northwest corner of Alamance County, it was if the coronavirus pandemic was a thing of the past. It was as if the United States wasn't approaching 100,000 deaths from the virus, and as though much of North Carolina hadn't been on lockdown just a week or so earlier. It was, amid a global crisis, a scene from life before.

Cars kept pulling into the grassy lot surrounding the racetrack, their arrival creating a mist of dirt and dust in the haze. The sun shined down upon the line. It continued growing longer and hotter, people inching closer to the front where they'd pay $12 to come inside and sit in the grandstand or in a lawn chair somewhere along the

ROBERT WILLETT rwillett@newsobserver.com

Race teams are jammed together in the infield of Ace Speedway as they line up for qualifying on Saturday.

SEE SPEEDWAY, 6A

Holiday weekend draws crowds – and triggers virus warnings

BY CURT ANDERSON
Associated Press

ST. PETERSBURG, FLA.

The Memorial Day weekend marking the unofficial start of summer in the U.S. meant big crowds at beaches and warnings from authorities Sunday about people disregarding the coronavirus social-distancing rules and risking a resurgence of the scourge that has killed nearly 100,000 Americans.

Sheriff's deputies and beach patrols tried to make sure people kept their distance from others as they soaked up the rays on the sand and at parks and other recreation sites around the country.

In the Tampa area along Florida's Gulf Coast, the crowds were so big that authorities took the extraordinary step of closing parking lots because they were full. Pinellas County Sheriff Bob Gualtieri said about 300 deputies were patrolling the beaches to ensure people didn't get too close.

On the Sunday talk shows, Dr. Deborah Birx, coordinator of the White House coronavirus task force, said she was "very concerned" about scenes of people crowding

SEE HOLIDAY, 2A

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